

# 300 travellers in request to be rehoused by council

- Community wants to stay together
- Authority seeking alternative homes

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AT LEAST 300 travellers could be rehoused by Basildon Council, if the authority forces them out of their illegal site.

So far, 170 adults and 130 children, members of the Dale Farm community, at Crays Hill, have asked for alternative accommodation.

More applications are expected, as a number of other travellers are away.

The council may have to pay for bed and breakfast accommodation for them, but it is also looking for available pitches across the country.

Travellers previously applied together to be rehoused, but it was rejected.

According to council sources, many individual applications may not be approved, as it is believed some travellers made themselves homeless by leaving legitimate sites in Thurrock and Hertfordshire, and council homes in Wolverhampton, as revealed by the Echo.

A letter, accompanied by the latest 45 applications, has asked the council why there has been no response to earlier rehousing requests made in January and February.

Campaigner Grattan Puxon said council policy stated a response would be forthcoming within five working days.

His letter said the community would not accept traditional housing, and they want to stay together.

It stated: "We don't wish to be split up, and we don't want to be forced to leave our private yards to live separated on council sites."

"We can't tolerate living in houses. It's against our culture. Travellers feel, having lost the possibility of following the old nomadic lifestyle,



■ Response - Tony Ball said the council could not guarantee everyone would be rehoused together

it is essential to the preservation of their culture and ethnicity to keep this community intact."

It asks for further private meetings with the council in June or July to discuss the matter, and for all responses to go to Mr Puxon because of problems with postal deliveries at the site.

Council leader Tony Ball said: "We have a duty to comply with homeless legislation, and each application will be considered individually."

"We cannot guarantee people will be rehoused together, as we may have a duty to rehouse some, but not in other cases."

"Where we have a duty, we will comply with legislation. Obviously, they have a way of life, and we have to take that into consideration."

Mr Ball said people may be housed outside the district, and the council was attempting to source vacant caravan pitches elsewhere, but it would not be buying land.

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## DONATION HELPS CENTRE BUY NEW COMPUTERS



■ Technology at their fingertips - youth centre members, from left, Freya Yexley, 11, Malacai Yexley, 13, Ellen Burrell, 11, and Alanna Curran, 11

Picture: PAUL WATSON SGJ98-2

CHILDREN at a Wickford youth centre will be able to brush up on their computer skills, thanks to a £4,000 donation.

The Downtowner, in Irvon Hill Road, was given the cash to help buy three computers, as part of a £90,000 Essex County Council scheme.

Youngsters using the centre are the first to benefit from the national scheme, as the Downtowner is the first of 17 youth groups to receive the technology boost.

Liz Marsden, youth worker at the centre, said several of the

computers the centre previously owned were up to ten years old, and were desperately in need of replacing.

She said: "The children use the computers to do all sorts of research and work, so these are really going to come in useful."